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ABSTRACT

A china factory in Pennsylvania was the setting for a study of the characteristics of the factory, its workers, and the community. Specifically, the speech of 151 informants, representing 12 1/2% of the plant population, was analyzed for both careful and casual speech, in order to focus on lexical and grammatical forms which reflect regional and local usage, as well as general linguistic phenomena, such as analogical creation, folk etymology, and changes in pronunciation. Data were collected by means of a reading (for careful speech) and interviews (for informal speech). (AM)

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Regional and General Speech Patterns of Factory Workers

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Abstract

This paper examines language in a factory setting and focuses on linguistic forms which reflect regional and local usage and forms which illustrate general linguistic phenomena including analogical creation, folk etymology and changes in pronunciation. The forms for analysis were taken from lexical items and grammatical expressions which occurred in the natural speech of factory workers.

Introduction

The study of regional dialects has traditionally encompassed large scale surveys of general settings (Kurath, McDavid 1969; Gumperz, Hymes 1973). A recent project which focused on language in a factory setting illustrates that small scale studies of industrial plants also provide adequate descriptions of regional dialects and general speech phenomena. The following material is part of that project which examined the characteristics and underlying features of occupational jargon.[1] The operational definition of jargon used in the project was: a combination of regional-local and general speech habits, individual speech styles and technical terminology associated with an occupation.[2]

A china factory located in New Castle, Pennsylvania, was studied using a case method of research with participant observations and interviews. The characteristics of the community, the factory and the workers were examined. A sample of 151 informants was selected by plant seniority and departmental affiliation.[3] The sample represented 12½% of the plant population and included workers from all generational and occupational levels and all work areas in the factory.

A reading[4] isolated the regional dialect of informants as careful speech and a questionnaire[5] presented in a conversational manner, elicited the workers' definitions of their environments. Photographs were used to help workers identify work-related material[6] and to promote free narrative during the interview so that casual speech could also be elicited.[7]

The reading which was presented at the beginning of the interview, when the context of the situation was assumed to be formal, contained the linguistic items cited by Kurath and McDavid as indicative of the regional dialect.[8] Items which occurred a number of times during the free narrative portion of the interview and during conversations outside the interview were defined as factory items. Since regional grammatical expressions and lexical items are best obtained from natural speech they have been included with the factory items. These items support the analysis of the regional system, serve as markers of the local pattern and illustrate the effects of general linguistic processes. Factory items which are identical with reading items are omitted from this discussion because their allophonic expressions are consistent with those already discussed in greater detail by

Kurath and McDavid. The criterianfor including items in this discussion is their usefulness in illustrating distinctive features of the regional-local dialect and general speech phenomena.

Regional and Local Usage

Factory items, fix, hood, Ben, fun,and bat support the regional pattern of short and long allophones for the vowels /I/, /U/, /E/, /ʌ/, and /æ/. An ingliding second element -[ə] occurs in fully stressed monosyllables before voiced consonants as in bid, good, and man resulting in [bIəd], [gUəd] and [mæən]. A few speakers have a tendency to raise [I] to [I^] before palatal fricative [š] as in dish. Others diphthongize [u] and [æ] to [Ui] and [ei] in push and ash. The raised forms are stigmatized as "hillbilly talk" by some workers.

Other features associated with the vowels include the occurrence of [I] in legal, regal, and commonweal and raised allophones for checked /æ/ and /E/ in began and get resulting in [bigEn], [bigɛn] and [gɛt]. Checked /ʌ/in just has fronted allophones [ɜ~I] which are most noticable in rapid casual speech. The latter allophonic expression is used only by a few management workers whose origins are in western or south-

western regions of the United States.

The regional pattern of long monophthongs or ungliding dipthongs for the vowels /i/, /u/, /e/, and /o/ is supported by the factory items, tree, two, ate, and load. Mid central /ə/ in the factory item dirty is expressed as [ɘr] or [ɵ]. The preferred form is [ər].

A number of factory items with ing endings such as lining, turning, and burning illustrate the tendency of workers to use alveolar nasal [in] rather than velar nasal [Iŋ]. After more backed consonants such as [š] as in burnishing and after [k] as in making [Iŋ] is used. The assimilation of the alveolar nasal to the dental fricative in length and strength as [lEnθ] and [strEnθ] is a distinctive feature of the local area.

The consistent use of /ɒ/ for words that may have /ɔ/ or /ɑ/ in other regions is shown by several factory items, lawn, cost, and top which are pronounced as [lɒn], [kɒst], and [tɒp].

Factory items, live, bound, and coil pronounced as [laᵊv], [bɑᵊnd], and [kɔᵊl] illustrate the tendency to center the glide of the diphthongs.

Factory items, hear, for, course, and Larry illustrate the preference for [r] rather than constricted

[ɝ] as the consonant /r/ in word final and medial positions. A more pronounced [r] is expressed by those workers from states west of the region.

Intrusive [r] in wash and ellipsis of /r/ in library occurs in the speech pattern of all local workers. The loss of post consonantal /r/ occurs in several factory items such as arbitration and refractory and loss of palatal glide occurs in items such as seniority and accumulate. Conversely, the word similar shows the intrusion of a palatal glide. The forms for seniority and similar are most apparent in the speech of union women, and the form for accumulate is most apparent in the speech of union men.

Lateral sonorant /l/ as in muddled and stolen is a dark [ɬ] with a retracted articulation and lip rounding. The positional allophone light [l] with front articulation does not have as noticable a lip rounding. The dark [ɬ] with lip rounding occurs in post-vocalic position and it also occurs intervocalically as in the factory item polish, [pʊ̃ɝ̃Is]. Informants who do not have the dark [ɬ] just described are from areas outside New Castle. It is interesting that

the ethnic background of some workers is Russian and Polish whose languages have phonemic systems that include velarized [ɬ] and sulcal [l], the latter as a positional replacement of [w].

The vowel before /l/ as in swollen may be expressed as three allophones [ɔ], [ɔ̃], or [ʌ]. The latter form is used by a number of younger informants.

Factory items steel, still, pool, pull, and collar, color show that contrasts of vowels [i≠I], [u≠U] and, in at least one instance, [ɑ≠ʌ] are reduced or lost before /l/. The homophonous pairs occur in the speech pattern of all the local workers.

Several other forms show the effects of both /l/ and /r/ on vowels and diphthongs. Contrasts of [E≠æ] as in factory items very, vary and contrasts of [ai≠au] as in tile, towel and tire, tower may be lost so that the members of each pair become homophonous.

A counter tendency to show contrasts of vowels occurring before /l/ or /r/, in careful speech often results in fronting the vowel articulation in one form, for example, [kElər] for color; or conversely, by backing the vowel articulation in one form, as in [vɑri] for vary.

Lack of [h] before [w] in initial position, as in the factory item wheel-o-brator is common in the speech of workers. The usage clearly falls within the boundary set by Kurath and McDavid for [hw] in when (Map 174). Although a few management workers from outside the region use [hw] in when the same workers, who are aware of the technical term wheel-o-brator, use the common regional, factory pronunciation of [wIləbrefər] both at work and outside the plant.

Voiced alveolar stop /d/ as in didn't has several allophones, voiced alveolar stop [d] with glottal constriction, voiceless stop [t$^{\text{ʔ}}$] with glottal stop, voiced flap [ɾ] and nasal [n̩]. The flap occurs only in the careful speech of some workers and the nasal occurs only in rapid casual speech.

Voiceless alveolar stop /t/ as in winter, splinter is articulated as a lengthened nasal [n̩] or as a flap [ɾ] and less commonly as a voiceless stop with aspiration [t$^{\text{h}}$]. The few informants who use the latter form, in careful speech, also use the voiced stop in didn't.

The use of glottal constriction with voiced and voiceless stops extends to factory items such as wouldn't, shouldn't, and couldn't. In other instances

where word juncture is not involved medial stops [d] or [k] as in advertise and doctor are lost. In the latter, there is compensatory glottal and alveolar coarticulation. Words such as understand and plenty illustrate the tendency of speakers to replace the alveolar flap with a nasal flap.

Other factory items such as bisque, mask, dusk, and ask show the effects of assimilation of final /k/ to [t] after /s/ resulting in [bIst], [mæst], [dʌst], and [æst]. In rapid speech final [t] of the assimilated forms is assimilated to /s/ resulting in [bIs], [mæs], [dʌs] and [æs].

A number of factory items support the usage pattern of [n̩] as a replacement for voiced dental fricative [ð]. The tendency is strongest when the items follow an, and in or on or other items with final [n], for example, in combinations such as this and that, in the, and on the. The result is a compensatorily lengthened [n:].

Lexical items which represent local speech relics may be used by older workers in contexts which are harmonious with older meanings but which may conflict with popular usage in other areas of the plant. The technical term verge which refers to "the inner edge

of a plate" in one department is used to refer to "the top of anything", an archaic use of the term.

Other lexical and grammatical items which occur in natural speech and reflect both current usage and regionalisms include a number of expressions which are reliable markers of the area. Whenever used for "when", leave and left used for "let", and needs used with past participles such as needs polished for "needs to be polished" or "needs polishing" are common. The following sentences which illustrate these usages were taken from natural speech.

Whenever I was a little boy I used to sell papers.
Union Male III

Leave me feel it.
Union Female II

I left it set awhile.
Union Female I

It needs washed.
Management Male II

Analogical creation accounts for a number of grammatical and lexical items. Smoothen and roughen derive from the verb forming combination of adjective plus verbal suffix en.

root adjective		suffix verbal		verb
deep	+	en	=	deepen
smooth	+	en	=	smoothen
rough	+	en	=	roughen

Some pronominal usage patterns are the result of analogical creation in which suffixes have been made from variations that were originally phonetically determined. Pottery workers as regional speakers frequently use the pronominal pattern associated with my, mine to form other pronouns such as hisn, hern, and theirn. Another form vounz is also used as a plural pronoun.

Other combinations which are the result of analogical creation include forms in which the agent suffix er is added to a noun or adjective or verb to produce a noun.

root noun		root adjective		root verb		suffix noun of agent		noun
foot			+		er	=		footer
		half	+		er	=		halfer
		old	+		er	=		older
				set	+	er	=	setter

Creating terms from the combination of noun of agency plus adverb, which is considered "more rare" (Robertson 1944,368) as a method of word creation, also occurs in the factory.

noun		adverb		noun
footer	+	up	=	footer-up
setter	+	up	=	setter-up

A reversal of the combination, that is, adverb plus

noun of agency, plus plural s produces the term insiders. This formation pattern shows the historical influence of the Scots dialect on the local speakers.

General Speech Habits

Several patterns of pronunciation represent other manifestations of general linguistic processes operating in the factory. Spelling pronunciation occurs during the careful and casual speech of many informants in union and management. Women, especially younger ones exhibit the speech pattern most often although men also use some of the same forms such as often, [ɒftən], towards [təwɒrdz], and beautiful [byuʃifəl].

Another speech pattern of older workers is the result of excrescent [t] in words such as once, twice across, and since resulting in [wʌnst], [twaɘst], [əkrɒst] and [sInst]. Conversely, many male union workers, in casual speech, do not have [st] in against resulting in [əgIn ət] for against it.

Excrescent sounds manifested as epenthesis and prothesis also account for a number of forms such as [grivIəns] for grievance, [InsEntətIv] for incentive and [IrIgardləs] for regardless.

The tendency to suppress or alter one of the sounds in a group results in dissimilation. This general speech habit accounts for a number of altered forms. Loss of [g] as in recognize results in the shortened form [rEkənaᵊz]. Loss of syllables, haplology, accounts for a number of other forms which are favored by many workers. Items such as practically and probably are shortened to [præklI] and [prɒblI].

The exchange of places between sounds, metathesis, results in forms such as [gEnərlI], [dIfərnt], and [mæŋgət] for generally, different and magnet.

Placement of stress also affects other forms in which primary stress is placed on the first syllable of some items which normally have the stress on the second syllable, for example, in the verb forms, reclaim, inspect, and reject, and in the noun refractory. The latter item, refractory, may also be pronounced with an ellipsis of [r].

The anticipation of sounds results in regressive assimilation such as loss of velar stops [k] and [g] and alveolar [t] in expect and exactly so that they are pronounced as [EspEkt] and [IzækklI].

Consonant clusters such as [kč] show the effects

of loss of [k] in picture as [pɪčər] and manufacture as [mæ nəfæčər], or [mæ nəfæktər].

Some items are examples of the effects of folk etymology. Practical definitions are provided for many plant-wide terms which ordinarily would not make sense to workers. One of several factors may account for the phenomenon, indistinct or incorrect pronunciation by the speaker's linguistic model, background interference which distorts the communication, or incorrect interpretation by the listener. Workers who do not hear new terms distinctly during their initial period at the plant relate them to sounds that are familiar to them or to sounds that remind them of familiar experiences. If the association they make between the sound and past experiences "makes sense" the new form is adopted. If others also use the same pronunciation, or adopt the worker's idiosyncratic form, the usage spreads. Once the form has been established as "correct" the user seldom notices any difference between his form and that of coworkers who use a different form.

The factory setting is an unusually good environment for folk etymology. The level of background

interference is high and continuous, the new terms are strange and related to uncommon concepts or experences associated with the job and there is pressure to conform quickly because of the need to interact with coworkers and supervisors.

Workers may provide lengthy explanations for some terms and have no explanation for others. The eighthead automatic jigger machine which orginally produced eight plates simultaneously is called eggheads because "it was made by eggheads". A blunger is called plunger because "it's a machine that has a big plunger that mixes the clays in the water". The pug mill is a plug mill because "the clay looks like plugs when it comes out" and water engobe is called water on go,"'cause the color goes on in water".

Workers also create reasons for the use of terms. The production quota for departments is called the goal or bogie. A few workers believe that the term bogie derived from "the bogie man that used to scare us when we were kids and now we're still scared of our bogie, that we won't make it."

Workers replace technical terms with common, familiar labels which represent a particular attribute

of the object to which the label refers. "A platform with iron legs is called a skid 'cause when you put things on it, it don't skid." "A pallet is called a flat cause its flat." "A high lift is called a high lift 'cause it lifts things high."

A number of pottery terms are transparent forms that provide clues to their historical development. The operations which workers perform and the materials which they use provide the central ideas, and through a combination of ellipsis, metathesis, on the syntactical level, and addition of noun of agency, er, job titles are produced.

He runs molds to the shelves. He runs molds. mold runner
She finishes the ware. She finishes ware. finisher
She polishes the ware. She polishes ware. polisher

Compound words are also formed from nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs which are independent elements.

stove room kiln fire man take out wash off
spit out ware house man wad clay way outs

Reducing names to initials also creates new vocabulary items.

afterdinner A.D. tea cup T.C. direct application D.A.

Terms which workers create from other words or their components which change results in a functional shift. Bogie is a noun when it is used as a goal, yet

some workers say "I bogied this week", or "Did you bogie yet?" while others say "Did you make your bogie?" Take off may define the worker or the function of the worker. "She's a take off" or "She'll take off today." There is no shift of stress in the latter form.

The discussion above has shown that the formative elements of the workers' communicative behavior reflects regional, local and general speech habits and that a factory setting provides a good opportunity to study these linguistic phenomena.

Footnotes

[1]The research for this paper was conducted while I was a Maxwell Fellow for the Department of Anthropology at Syracuse University

[2]Occupational jargon is the subject of my doctoral dissertation in which a basic assumption is that linguistic processes and social forces which operate in more general settings also operate in a factory setting. A discussion of speech differences related to generational variation appears in "Speech Differences of Factory Worker Age Groups" by P. Tway in Studies in Linguistics, 25.

[3]The plant seniority of individuals refers to their seniority category: Category I represents 0-8 years; Category II represents 9-19 years: and Category III 20-60 years. Departmental affiliation refers to particular work areas within the factory.

[4]The reading was a short paragraph which contained words that help to identify a western Pennsylvania speaker.

[5]The questionnaire focused on work at the factory level, the departmental level and the personal level.

[6]The subject of dialect boundaries and transitional

zones within the factory are discussed fully in, "Work-place Isoglosses: Lexical Variation and Change in a Factory Setting" by P. Tway in Language in Society, 5.

[7]The careful speech forms were elicited by the reading which contained the words, didn't, doing, began, dusk, and swollen. The casual speech forms for the same items were observed during the free narrative portion of the interview and during working hours outside the interview. The subject is discussed fully in, "The Careful and Casual Speech of Factory Workers" by P. Tway in Studia Linguistica.

[8]Hans Kurath and Raven I. McDavid, Jr. discuss the Western Pennsylvania dialect in their book titled, The Pronunciation of English in the United States, published in 1961.

[9]The manner in which workers associate symbols with objects is discussed more fully in, "Cognitive Processes and Linguistic Forms of Factory Workers" by P. Tway in Semiotica.

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